

**The following blog entry was published by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) regarding the recognition of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS). If you attend any of the following schools, you may be impacted by the DOE decision:**

<b>ACICS Schools Approved for GI Bill® Benefits in Virginia</b>
American College of Commerce and Technology
American National University - Salem
American National University - Martinsville
American National University - Lynchburg
American National University - Harrisonburg
American National University - Danville
American National University - Charlottesville
Bon Secours Memorial College of Nursing
Columbia College
Everest College - Woodbridge
Everest College - Chesapeake
Fortis College - Richmond
Fortis College - Norfolk
Global Health College
Miller-Motte Technical College - Lynchburg
Miller-Motte Technical College - Roanoke
Sentara College of Health Sciences
Stratford University - Falls Church
Stratford University - Woodbridge
Stratford University - Newport News
Stratford University - Alexandria Campus
Stratford University - Glen Allen
Stratford University - Virginia Beach
Virginia College - Richmond

**The Virginia SAA is posting this blog entry to our website for your information. You can find the original blog entry here: <http://blog.ed.gov/2016/12/college-accreditation-update/>**

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## UPDATE: What College Accreditation Changes Mean for Students

*Editor's Note: An earlier version of this blog post appeared [here](#). This post has been updated to reflect the most recent developments.*

For millions of Americans, federal student loans and grants open the doors to a college education. That critical federal student aid must be used at a school that is (among other things) given the seal of approval by an “accrediting agency” or “accreditor” recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. It’s one of the safeguards in the system. Accreditation is an important signal to students, families, and the Department about whether a school offers a quality education. Accreditors have a responsibility under federal law to make sure colleges earn that seal.

But what happens when the Department stops recognizing an accrediting agency?

It’s a relatively unusual case, but it’s a relevant one today. Today, Secretary King—as part of our [regular process for reviewing accreditors](#)—[upheld the decision](#) to stop recognizing the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (or ACICS) as an agency that can provide schools with an accreditation that makes them eligible for participation in federal aid. For more information about the failures that led to that recommendation [click here](#).

I’ll try to answer some of what you might be wondering today, and we’ll continue to provide more information as the process plays out.

### **How do I know if my school is accredited by ACICS?**

Good first question. [You can look it up here](#).

### **What does this mean for students at ACICS-accredited institutions?**

Many institutions will not be impacted for the next 18 months, which is the time they have to receive accreditation by another recognized agency.

The 18-month timeframe means that a number of students who already have started at one of these schools will be able to complete their certificates or degrees before anything changes.

Generally speaking, if you’re near the end of your program or you’re preparing to transfer to another college or university, this news probably won’t interrupt your program. Your school will let you know directly if that’s not the case.

States also have a role to play with schools’ ability to receive student aid. So we’ve also required your school to notify you if any state action or other circumstance affects their ability to participate while they look for a new accreditor.

## **What happens next?**

Your school and others accredited by ACICS now have 18 months to get a seal of approval from a different recognized accreditor in order to stay eligible to participate in federal student aid programs. **Schools are eligible to continue their participation in the meantime.**

Again, if you're wondering whether changes in your school's accreditation status might affect your specific plans, you should reach out to your school for individualized advice.

It's worth noting here that licensing for some jobs – but not all – may require that your program is currently accredited by a Department-recognized accreditor. Contact your institution and/or the licensure board in your field to see if this is the case.

## **Okay, so it will take a while, but what if a school ultimately can't find an accreditor?**

At that point, students would no longer be able to use their federal student aid at those schools. Students who have not completed their program and want to continue to use federal loans or grants past that point would need to transfer to another school. Schools also need to have a plan in place to inform students about their options.

## **What if I want to transfer out of my school?**

That's a decision only you can make, but we have some tools that can help if you decide to transfer. In particular, you might want to check out the [College Scorecard](#) to look into other options and see how well those schools prepare their graduates for life after college.

Again, circumstances will be unique to each student and each school, but you may be able to transfer your credits. You'll want to check with the new school's registrar.

## **I just started a program at an ACICS-accredited school. What should I do?**

You may want to be in touch with your school now, at the start of the 18-month period, to understand its plan to pursue accreditation with a different accreditor. Throughout the coming months, if the school isn't taking steps towards a new accreditation process, we'll require it to disclose that information directly to its students.

You might also want to do a little research using the [College Scorecard](#). There, you can make sure your school has a track record of preparing its students for successful careers. You can also compare other options if you're interested in transferring.

## **I already graduated from an ACICS-accredited school. Is my degree compromised?**

Nobody can take away the hard work you put in or the skills you gained. Your school was accredited when you completed your program, and you'll never have to return your certificate or diploma.

If you have concerns about your license or credential, please contact the relevant licensure board in your state.

**Now what?**

If your school is not on track to be accredited by another Department-recognized accreditor, then your school should be in touch immediately with you to share information about your options. Also, you can continue to track your school's accreditation status [here](#).

Whatever you choose to do, please know this: you have a wealth of options in pursuing your education, so don't stop. Getting a high-quality degree or credential in a field where employers are hiring is still the surest way to provide for your future economic security.

For our part, we'll keep working to protect students like you and support you as you work to complete your degree or credential.

*Matt Lehrich is Communications Director at the Department of Education.*